



Transformation in Sea Sand Sun Tourism Research: A Literature Review on Thematic Developments and Changing Paradigms between 2010-2024

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Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive review of sea-sand-sun (SSS) tourism research from 2010 to 2024, mapping thematic shifts, conceptual evolution, and emerging paradigms. Synthesizing articles, books, and conference proceedings from academic databases, it shows that SSS scholarship has moved beyond traditional mass-tourism and strictly growth-oriented frames. Sustainability—environmental, socio-cultural, and economic—now anchors inquiry. Concurrently, changing tourist profiles, experience-driven expectations, and digitalization have reshaped marketing, while product diversification, alternative tourism, and destination repositioning have gained prominence. Global crises, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, propelled topics such as crisis management, risk, and destination resilience to the forefront. Governance, policy, and planning approaches have evolved toward more participatory, adaptive, and sustainability-focused models. Overall, SSS tourism research in 2010–2024 displays a more critical, holistic, and solution-oriented character aimed at long-term sustainability. This transformation yields significant theoretical and practical implications for future development strategies, including integrated sustainability metrics, experience design, digital marketing analytics, and resilience planning. It also opens promising avenues for further research on climate adaptation, inclusive accessibility, regenerative tourism, smart technologies, and multi-stakeholder governance. By consolidating dispersed insights, the review clarifies the field's evolving priorities and provides a coherent agenda for scholars and practitioners committed to reshaping SSS destinations for sustainable competitiveness in the future.

1. Introduction

Sea-sand-sun (SSS) tourism is a well-established form of tourism that constitutes the primary attraction of coastal destinations worldwide and is traditionally considered a significant component of mass tourism (Butler, 2014). SSS tourism, which has been a major source of economic income and employment for many regions for decades, has undergone a remarkable transformation, particularly between 2010 and 2024. During this period, profound impacts were observed due to changes in global economic dynamics, the acceleration of technological innovations (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015), the increasing importance of the sustainability concept (Scott et al., 2019), and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Gossling et al., 2020). These factors have shaped both the practical application of SSS tourism and the direction of academic research in this field. SSS tourism is now evolving beyond the traditional understanding of solely sunbathing, swimming, and resting, into a complex

structure aiming for environmental and social responsibilities, integration with local economic development, and offering more authentic and transformative experiences for tourists.

The main purpose of this literature review is to comprehensively identify the core themes in academic studies on sea-sand-sun (SSS) tourism published between 2010 and 2024, the evolution of these themes over time, prominent new research topics, and changing paradigms. In this context, it will be examined how academic interest in SSS tourism has shifted away from merely analyzing economic impacts and traditional marketing strategies towards much more diverse and in-depth topics such as sustainability, the impacts of climate change, technological integration and digitalization, changing tourist expectations and personalized experiences, social tourism and inclusivity, and crisis management and destination resilience. Particularly, understanding how the foundations laid by [Gordon \(2007\)](#) through the analysis of sustainability assessment tools in tourism have been reflected in SSS research in the post-2010 era and how they have influenced methodological and conceptual approaches in this field is crucial. Similarly, developments in tourism economics research ([Song et al., 2012](#)) and regional economic integration and competition strategies, as in the case of Greece ([Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015](#)), shed light on how the economic dimension of SSS tourism has been reconceptualized.

This study seeks to answer the following main research questions:

- What main themes and sub-themes have emerged in SSS tourism research between 2010 and 2024?
- How have these themes evolved within the specified timeframe (e.g., which topics have lost popularity, which new ones have emerged, or which have increased in importance)?
- What changes are observed in the methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks in SSS tourism research?
- In light of the main findings in the literature, what predictions can be made for the future of SSS tourism, and in which areas is more research needed?

In line with the stated purpose and research questions, this literature review has examined articles, books, and conference proceedings screened from major national and international academic databases (e.g., Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, TR Dizin) using keywords such as "sea sand sun tourism," "coastal tourism," "sustainable tourism," "transformation in tourism," "tourism economics," "tourist behaviors," "COVID-19 and tourism," and various combinations thereof. The selected studies were prioritized based on their publication range (specifically 2010-2024), their direct or indirect relevance to SSS tourism, and their academic impact value. In the following sections, the traditional understanding of SSS tourism and the initial critical approaches to this understanding will first be addressed; then, the transformation in SSS research will be examined in detail under main themes such as sustainability, changing tourist profiles and marketing, product diversification, crisis management, and destination management. Finally, the findings will be synthesized, a general discussion will be conducted, and recommendations for future research will be presented.

2. Sea-Sand-Sun Tourism: Conceptual Framework and Traditional Approaches

Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism, as one of the most established and widespread segments of the global tourism market, gained a mass character, particularly from the second half of the 20th century. This section will address the fundamental definition and characteristic features of SSS tourism, followed by an examination of its place within the traditional mass tourism model and the main criticisms directed at this model, which became prominent

especially before 2010 and in the early years of the 2010-2024 period. This background is critically important for understanding the transformation in SSS tourism research, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

2.1. Definition and Core Characteristics of Sea-Sand-Sun Tourism

Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism, as its name suggests, is a type of recreational tourism primarily motivated by the trio of sun, sea, and sand, generally concentrated in coastal regions. Traditionally, this form of tourism has been characterized by the "4S" model (Sun, Sea, Sand, Sex), also referenced by [Sotiriadis and Varvaressos \(2015\)](#); while the first three components constitute the main attraction, the fourth component has played an indirect or direct role in the marketing and perception of some destinations. The core characteristics of SSS tourism include ([Weaver, 2012](#)):

- **Dependence on Natural Resources:** Its primary appeal is based on natural and climatic resources (sunny days, warm seawater, beaches). This makes SSS destinations particularly vulnerable to environmental changes and pressures.
- **Seasonality:** It is generally concentrated in specific periods of the year (especially summer months), leading to seasonal demand fluctuations and capacity utilization problems in destinations.
- **Mass Orientation:** Historically, it targets large groups of tourists and becomes accessible through standardized package tours.
- **Intensive Infrastructure Requirement:** It requires intensive infrastructure development, such as large-scale accommodation facilities (hotels, holiday resorts), and food, beverage, and entertainment amenities.
- **Recreational Activities:** The main activities are passive or active recreational pursuits such as sunbathing, swimming, water sports, and relaxation.

Although this traditional structure of SSS tourism made it an important source of economic income and employment for many countries for many years, it also led to significant questions over time regarding sustainability and social welfare.

2.2. Sea-Sand-Sun Tourism as a Traditional Mass Tourism Model and Its Criticisms (Pre-2010s and Early 2010s)

Sea-sand-sun (SSS) tourism, in its development process, largely exhibited the characteristics of the mass tourism model. This model is characterized by standardized products, operations based on economies of scale, and often the marketing power of large tour operators external to the destination. However, this model faced intense criticism from various perspectives, particularly before the 2010s and in the early years of the 2010-2024 period:

- **Environmental Impacts** The most prominent negative impacts of SSS tourism have been observed on the environment. Rapid and unplanned tourism development has led to air, water, and noise pollution in coastal areas, causing degradation of the natural landscape and waste management problems ([Sunlu, 2003](#)). Excessive pressure has been placed on water resources in areas where tourism activities are concentrated, coastal erosion has accelerated, and local ecosystems and biodiversity have been harmed. As emphasized by [Shahgerdi et al. \(2016\)](#), this complex relationship between tourism and the environment shows that tourism growth inevitably leads to environmental transformations. As also mentioned by [Gordon \(2007\)](#), environmental problems caused by limited natural resources and economic development policies increased the importance of the sustainability concept and assessment tools.

- **Socio-Cultural Impacts** Mass tourism can lead to the commercialization of local cultures, changes in traditional lifestyles, and social conflicts between local people and tourists. Overcrowding can reduce the quality of life for local residents and negatively affect the quality of tourists' experiences (Koens et al., 2018). Social injustices stemming from economic development policies, voiced early on by Gordon (2007), point to problems observable in some SSS tourism practices.
- **Economic Issues** A significant portion of the income generated from SSS tourism leaking out through international companies or intermediaries outside the region (economic leakage) has prevented the local economy from fully reaping the expected benefits from tourism. Over-reliance on a single sector (tourism) has made destination economies vulnerable to global crises (Song et al., 2012), demand fluctuations, and seasonality. The lack of research on the determinants of tourism supply, as indicated by Song et al. (2012), may also point to weaknesses in the supply-side planning and management of SSS destinations and the resulting unbalanced economic structure. Sotiriadis and Varvaressos (2015) indirectly criticize these old models by arguing for a departure from traditional models to increase the economic and social benefits derived from tourism and improve the welfare of the host population.
- **General Sustainability Concerns** The environmental, socio-cultural, and economic problems mentioned above have strengthened criticisms that SSS tourism, within the traditional mass tourism model, is not sustainable in the long term. This situation paved the way for studies like Gordon (2007) to focus on sustainability assessment tools and for researchers like Shahgerdi et al. (2016) to emphasize the need for well-prepared strategies to mitigate the negative environmental consequences of tourism.

These criticisms significantly shaped the agenda of SSS tourism research in the post-2010 period, leading to the prominence of topics such as sustainability, local development, responsible tourism, and the search for alternative forms of tourism.

3. Prominent Themes and Shifts in Sea-Sand-Sun Tourism Research (2010-2024)

Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism research exhibited significant thematic shifts and a deepening analytical approach between 2010 and 2024. Studies traditionally focused on economic growth and marketing increasingly gave way during this period to topics such as sustainability, changing consumer behaviors and technological integration, resilience to crises, and more participatory management models. This section will examine these prominent themes in SSS tourism research and their evolution over time.

3.1. The Rise of Sustainability Paradigms and Increased Scrutiny of Multidimensional Impacts

The 2010-2024 period can be defined as a process in SSS tourism research where the concept of sustainability became a central element of discussion, and its environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions were addressed in an interrelated and holistic manner. Early studies, such as the analysis of sustainability assessment tools in tourism (Gordon, 2007), laid the groundwork for sustainability discussions in post-2010 SSS research, emphasizing the critical importance of integrating environmental and social values into tourism development. During this period, not only the environmental impacts of SSS tourism but also its socio-cultural reflections on local communities and the sustainability of the economic structure were increasingly scrutinized more closely.

The pressure of SSS tourism on sensitive coastal ecosystems has continuously kept environmental sustainability concerns on the agenda. Research has continued to focus on issues such as pollution,

overconsumption of water resources, coastal erosion, and biodiversity loss. Notably, [Shahgerdi et al. \(2016\)](#) highlighted the inevitable transformations tourism growth imposes on environmental resources and the need for well-prepared strategies to mitigate its negative impacts. The potential effects of climate change on SSS destinations – such as sea-level rise and extreme weather events – and adaptation strategies for these also emerged as prominent research topics during this period. Bibliometric analyses conducted by [Sánchez Cañizares et al. \(2018\)](#) show a concentration of research on sustainable tourism and climate impacts, especially in sensitive areas like coastal regions. Solution-oriented approaches also developed; [Silongwengia \(2017\)](#) treated sustainable tourism as a transformative tool that protects natural and cultural resources and pointed to the role of digital tools in this process. In the post-COVID-19 era, innovative solutions for issues like waste management and the role of sustainability in the sector's recovery were further emphasized ([Orîndaru, et al., 2021](#)).

In the context of socio-cultural sustainability, the impacts of SSS tourism on local communities, the preservation of cultural heritage, and tourism's contribution to social welfare emerged as important research areas. [Lima and Moura \(2017\)](#), in their review of social tourism, particularly targeting the inclusion of marginalized groups in tourism, emphasized the potential of such approaches to enhance social cohesion and quality of life. Enhancing the well-being of host communities and their participation in tourism planning began to be recognized as critical factors for the long-term success of SSS destinations. Transformational travel experiences, as examined by [Wolf et al. \(2017\)](#), were seen as having the potential to allow tourists to develop not only personally but also a sensitivity towards cultural heritage and the environment, thereby benefiting both tourists and local communities. [Orîndaru et al. \(2021\)](#) proposed the concept of "human flourishing" as a framework for understanding post-COVID-19 tourism dynamics, pointing to the importance of approaches that consider the well-being of both tourists and host communities.

Research in economic sustainability, meanwhile, shifted from merely measuring the contribution of SSS tourism to GDP towards questioning the quality and distribution of economic benefits and their integration with local development. The review of tourism economics research by [Song et al. \(2012\)](#) identified key areas such as demand elasticities, economic impacts, market structure, and policy, while also highlighting research gaps in areas like the determinants of tourism supply. The impacts of events such as the global financial crisis on tourism economics, in particular, underscored the importance of economic resilience and diversification for SSS destinations. [Sotiriadis and Varvaressos \(2015\)](#), in the context of Greece, proposed mechanisms for more effective integration of tourism into regional production systems and to support the long-term well-being of SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Tourism Enterprises), whereby a portion of the income generated would be reinvested in the sustainability of local resources and community services. [Silongwengia \(2017\)](#) also noted that sustainable tourism could provide economic benefits, especially for poor nations, but that this must be integrated with poverty reduction goals.

In conclusion, between 2010 and 2024, sustainability in SSS tourism research increasingly moved away from a one-dimensional environmentalist understanding to become more widely accepted as a holistic and transformative paradigm that considers ecological, social, and economic dimensions in a balanced manner, emphasizing stakeholder participation and local welfare. Studies during this period focused on creating the necessary theoretical and practical frameworks for SSS tourism not just to become a "harmless" structure, but to transform into a sector that offers positive contributions.

3.2. Transformation in Tourist Profiles, Expectations, and Marketing Strategies

Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism witnessed significant changes not only on the supply side but also on the demand side between 2010 and 2024. During this period, it has been observed that the traditional SSS tourist profile has diversified, expectations have varied, and in parallel, the marketing strategies of destinations and businesses have undergone a radical transformation (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). Academic research has also provided important findings aimed at understanding these changes and shaping the future marketing dynamics of SSS tourism (Pizam, 2010).

Changes in tourist profiles during this period became a major focus of SSS research. Instead of SSS tourists traditionally perceived as a homogeneous mass, the existence of segments with different motivations, values, and lifestyles is now accepted (Pesonen, 2012). It can be said that demographic changes, such as the aging population mentioned by Zhou (2022) for the general tourism industry, also require greater consideration of the needs of specific segments in SSS tourism (e.g., older tourists seeking quieter and more accessible holidays). More importantly, psychographic changes have come to the fore; new types of tourists focused on experience, with high personal development, health, well-being, and environmental awareness, such as the "transformational travel" participants studied by Wolf et al. (2017), have emerged as a potential audience for SSS destinations as well (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Silongwengjia (2017) also notes a shift towards more holistic and transformative practices in tourism, indicating that tourists are now seeking meaningful interactions rather than just a passive holiday.

In parallel with this change in tourist profiles, a significant evolution in expectations has occurred. While the traditional promise of SSS tourism – sunbathing and relaxation – remains important, it is no longer sufficient for many tourists (Yeoman, 2008; Kozak, 2020). Sotiriadis and Varvaressos (2015) emphasize a transformation in tourism experiences from the traditional "4S (Sun, Sea, Sand, Sex)" concept to the "4I (Information, Insight, Involvement, Inspiration)" framework. This indicates that tourists now want to connect more deeply with the destination, understand the local culture, have authentic experiences, and be personally enriched. Health and wellness experiences, nature-based physical activities, spiritual quests, and travel involving volunteering, as discussed by Wolf et al. (2017), also offer potential for SSS destinations to develop products for such niche markets (Gossling, 2010). With increased environmental awareness, the tendency of tourists to prefer businesses and destinations with sustainable and responsible tourism practices has also strengthened. The "human flourishing" framework proposed by Orindaru et al. (2021) for the post-COVID-19 era also points to expectations for deeper and more meaningful holidays that consider the well-being of both tourists and host communities.

Changing tourist profiles and expectations have inevitably triggered the transformation of marketing strategies in SSS tourism. While the effectiveness of traditional, mass marketing-based approaches has declined, more targeted, personalized strategies that effectively use digital technologies have come to the fore (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Sotiriadis and Varvaressos (2015) state that marketing strategies need to be rethought, that an integrated communication mix will maximize marketing effectiveness, and that destinations must now create meaningful and engaging experiences rather than just offering products. The integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), leveraging the full potential of e-marketing tools, and adapting to the rapidly changing landscape in travel and tourism have been crucial in this process (Xiang et al., 2017; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016). Silongwengjia (2017) also emphasized that the integration of digital tools into sustainable tourism practices offers the potential to improve resource management and communicate more effectively with tourists on sustainability issues. Marketing messages have also begun to move beyond the "sun, sea, sand" trilogy to highlight the unique

stories of the destination, its cultural values, the transformative experiences it offers, and its sustainability efforts. In this context, it has become critical for competitive advantage for destinations to build a strong brand identity based on customized experiences developed through stakeholder collaboration and reflecting new values (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

These changes necessitate that SSS tourism providers and researchers better understand tourists, be sensitive to their expectations, use technology effectively, and develop value-focused, flexible marketing strategies. The 2010-2024 period shows that SSS marketing has evolved from a mass-produced and unidirectional understanding towards a more personal, interactive, and meaning-oriented paradigm.

3.3. Product Diversification, Alternative Tourism, and the Repositioning of SSS Tourism

Criticisms of the traditional model of Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism and the problems this model created, particularly regarding seasonality, economic dependence, and environmental pressures, directed SSS destinations and researchers in this field towards product diversification and the search for alternative tourism between 2010 and 2024. Academic studies during this period examined how SSS tourism could break free from its "sun, sea, and sand" mold to achieve a more diverse, sustainable, and year-round vibrant structure (Dodds & Butler, 2010; Weaver, 2006). This pursuit also brought with it efforts to reposition SSS destinations and appeal to a broader tourist base (Pike & Page, 2014).

The risks of over-reliance on SSS tourism became even more apparent, especially during periods of economic crisis and demand fluctuations, which was one of the main motivations driving destinations to diversify their tourism products (Hall, 2010). Research has emphasized the importance of developing new forms of tourism that complement or substitute SSS while maintaining its core appeal (Sharpley, 2009). The concept of "transformational travel," as examined by Wolf et al. (2017), points to niche markets that SSS destinations can also offer, such as health and wellness experiences, nature-based outdoor activities, spiritual and cultural programs, or travel involving volunteering (Reisinger, 2013). Such alternatives have the potential to enrich the traditional image of SSS and attract tourist groups with different expectations. For example, the proximity of SSS destinations to natural and cultural heritage sites can enable the development of products like ecotourism or heritage tourism, which are based on the conservation of these areas and offer meaningful experiences to tourists (Eagles et al., 2002).

In the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, the rise of new areas such as medical tourism and the search for diversity in leisure activities, as noted by Menon et al. (2022), has once again demonstrated the importance of product diversification (Connell, 2006). Social tourism, as discussed by Lima and Moura (2017), can help SSS destinations diversify their income by utilizing idle capacity in the low season and providing social benefits, thereby developing a more inclusive tourism approach (Minnaert et al., 2012). Zhou (2022), stating that niche segments like conference tourism in the African context should be examined in relation to broader market shifts, also indicates that SSS destinations should evaluate their potential in areas such as congress, meeting, or event tourism (Fenich, 2014; Aydin, 1997).

Product diversification efforts do not merely mean increasing the activities offered by SSS destinations; they also involve redefining the overall identity of the destination and its position in the market. Sotiriadis and Varvaressos (2015) emphasize the need to shift from traditional tourism models to a more holistic approach and that destinations should now offer customized and meaningful experiences, not just products. This requires SSS destinations to position themselves not just as "sea and sun" holiday spots, but as multifaceted destinations with

cultural richness, natural beauty, local gastronomy, adventure opportunities, or wellness services (Kozak et al., 2014). The role of sustainable tourism as a holistic and transformative development tool, emphasized by Silongwengjia (2017), also shows that product diversification should be planned not only to be economically supportive but also to enhance environmental and socio-cultural sustainability (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Although this repositioning and product diversification process brings various challenges for destination management (e.g., developing infrastructure and human resources for new products, reaching different marketing channels, ensuring collaboration among local stakeholders), it also offers significant opportunities for SSS destinations to increase their competitiveness, reduce seasonality, spread tourism revenues over a broader base, and strengthen their overall sustainability. Academic research in the 2010-2024 period has provided important insights into how these opportunities can be seized and challenges overcome.

3.4. The Growing Importance of Research on Crises, Risks, Security, and Resilience

Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism is inherently a sector vulnerable to various external shocks and risks. The 2010-2024 period was a time when SSS destinations increasingly faced economic crises, political instabilities, natural disasters, threats stemming from climate change, security concerns, and particularly global health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has led academic research to focus with growing interest on crisis management, risk perception, security measures, and most importantly, the resilience of destinations and tourism businesses.

Research during this period examined various types of crises and risks affecting SSS tourism. Economic shocks, such as the global financial crisis mentioned by Song et al. (2012), demonstrated how sensitive SSS tourism is to demand and general economic conditions, once again emphasizing the importance of economic diversification. Extreme weather events caused by climate change and security threats like terrorism, as noted by Zhou (2022), were treated as significant risk factors threatening both the environmental and social sustainability of SSS destinations. Shahgerdi et al. (2016) drew attention to the complexity of the tourism-environment interaction, stating that environmental degradation itself constitutes a chronic risk for SSS destinations and that well-prepared strategies are needed to mitigate negative environmental consequences.

However, the most significant event that marked this period and profoundly affected crisis management research was undoubtedly the COVID-19 pandemic. Bibliometric analysis by Menon et al. (2022) reveals how the pandemic has shaped current and future research themes in tourism and hospitality education. The pandemic painfully demonstrated how fragile SSS tourism can be, leading to consequences such as international travel coming to a standstill, health and hygiene standards becoming a top priority, and radical changes in consumer behavior. Research intensively examined the immediate impacts of the pandemic on the SSS sector, the survival strategies of businesses and destinations, the role of digitalization in crisis communication, and the sector's recovery processes. Menon et al. (2022) also emphasized that the pandemic offered an opportunity to rethink tourism practices and enhance resilience in the sector, with sustainability potentially acting as a catalyst in this recovery process.

The COVID-19 pandemic and other crises have led to the concept of resilience becoming a central theme in SSS tourism research (Becken & Hughey, 2013). Instead of merely focusing on what to do during a crisis, research now examines strategies aimed at increasing the capacity of destinations and businesses to be prepared for crises in advance, respond effectively during a crisis, and recover quickly afterward to achieve a stronger structure (adaptive

capacity) (Biggs et al., 2012). Findings suggesting that sustainable tourism practices contribute to making destinations more resilient to environmental, social, and economic shocks gained further importance during this period (Menon et al., 2022). In this context, risk management, inter-stakeholder coordination, flexible business models, and innovative solutions have emerged as critical research areas for making SSS tourism more resilient to future crises (Prayag, 2020).

In conclusion, the 2010-2024 period, especially with the profound crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, has prioritized topics of crisis management, risk reduction, and resilience in SSS tourism research. Studies in this field have focused on generating knowledge and strategies not only to help the SSS sector overcome current crises but also to achieve a more proactive, adaptive, and sustainable structure against future uncertainties.

3.5. Evolution in Governance, Policy, and Planning Approaches

The challenges faced and transformations experienced by Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism between 2010 and 2024 (such as sustainability pressures, changing tourist expectations, increased competition, and crises) have also brought about a significant evolution in the ways this type of tourism is governed, planned, and how policies are formulated. Academic research during this period revealed the inadequacy of traditional, often top-down approaches focused solely on economic growth, emphasizing the need for more participatory, holistic, flexible, and sustainability-oriented governance, policy, and planning models.

The most notable change in governance understanding during this period has been the increasing acceptance of the importance of multi-stakeholder and participatory approaches. The complex nature of SSS destinations has shown that they cannot be effectively managed solely by the decisions of central governments or large private sector actors (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Sotiriadis and Varvaressos (2015) pointed to the necessity of destination-level cooperation and stakeholder participation, especially in designing and delivering customized experiences. Similarly, Shahgerdi et al. (2016) argued that the participation of local communities and government is vital for the success of sustainable tourism planning and that collaborative governance can enhance the resilience of destinations against environmental degradation. This has led to an increase in research and policies aimed at more actively involving local people, non-governmental organizations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and other relevant groups in decision-making and implementation processes related to SSS tourism (Graci, 2020).

A significant evolution has also been observed in tourism policies. Policies that generally focused on increasing tourist numbers and revenue before 2010 increasingly began to internalize sustainability principles during this period. The relationship between sustainability assessment tools and government policies, as examined by Gordon (2007), indicated early awareness in this direction, which began to translate into concrete policy steps in the post-2010 era. Silongwengjia (2017) stated that criteria set by international organizations like the Global Sustainable Tourism Council have become an important policy tool shaping the efforts of tourism businesses to protect natural and cultural resources and reduce poverty. Furthermore, policies were developed aimed at diversifying products to reduce the economic vulnerability of SSS destinations, mitigating the effects of seasonality, and ensuring greater contributions to local economies (UNWTO, 2013). Mechanisms such as reinvesting a portion of tourism revenues into the sustainability of local resources and community services, as proposed by Sotiriadis and Varvaressos (2015), exemplify policy pursuits in this direction. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, as also emphasized by Menon et al. (2022), policies aimed at crisis management, health security, and enhancing the overall resilience of the sector gained priority (Baum & Hai, 2020).

A similar transformation has occurred in planning approaches. The traditional planning understanding, focused on physical infrastructure and facility development, has given way to integrated tourism planning principles that consider environmental, socio-cultural, and economic factors together. [Shahgerdi et al. \(2016\)](#) emphasized the need for well-prepared strategies and effective planning to minimize the negative impacts of tourism and maximize its positive contributions. [Sánchez Cañizares et al. \(2018\)](#) revealed the necessity for special planning approaches and targeted research that consider the unique needs of SSS areas with sensitive ecosystems, particularly islands and coastal regions. Critical shifts and uncertainties in the global tourism industry, as noted by [Zhou \(2022\)](#), indicate that SSS planning processes must now be based on dynamic, flexible, and adaptive strategies rather than static ones. This means that plans should be regularly reviewed, adaptable to changing conditions, and prepared for possible scenarios ([Baggio & Sainaghi, 2011](#)).

In conclusion, between 2010 and 2024, governance, policy, and planning approaches in the SSS tourism field have undergone a significant evolution in response to the new challenges and opportunities faced by the sector. This evolution is progressing towards the goal of creating a more participatory, transparent, accountable, sustainability-focused, and resilient SSS sector against future uncertainties. Academic research in this area continues to guide policymakers and practitioners by producing knowledge and models that support this transformation.

4. Synthesis Of Key Findings and Discussion

This literature review reveals that significant thematic shifts and a conceptual evolution occurred in academic studies published in the field of Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism between 2010 and 2024. SSS research, traditionally focused largely on economic growth and mass marketing, has increasingly adopted a critical perspective during this period, incorporating multidimensional issues such as sustainability, changing demand structures, technological integration, resilience to crises, and more participatory governance models into its agenda. This section will synthesize the main transformations in SSS research in light of the reviewed literature and discuss the meaning of these transformations.

4.1. Main Thematic Shifts and Evolution in SSS Tourism Research (2010-2024)

The 2010-2024 period demonstrates a significant departure in SSS tourism research from traditional mass tourism and solely economic growth-oriented approaches. The fundamental evolution is the acceptance of SSS tourism as a complex socio-ecological system and the prioritization of its long-term sustainability.

The most dominant theme of this period is the rise of sustainability as a multidimensional (environmental, socio-cultural, economic) paradigm ([Gordon, 2007](#); [Silongwengjia, 2017](#)). Environmental research evolved from identifying the impacts of SSS to climate change adaptation and proactive conservation strategies ([Shahgerdi et al., 2016](#); [Sánchez Cañizares et al., 2018](#)). In the socio-cultural domain, issues such as the well-being and participation of local communities and the preservation of cultural heritage received increasing attention ([Shahgerdi et al., 2016](#); [Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015](#)), while in economic studies, equitable benefit distribution and structural resilience came to the fore ([Menon et al., 2022](#); [Lima & Moura, 2017](#)). In parallel, a radical transformation occurred in marketing strategies due to changing tourist profiles, an increased quest for experiences, and the impact of digitalization ([Zhou, 2022](#); [Wolf et al., 2017](#); [Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015](#)). Research focused on new tourist segments demanding conscious and personalized experiences and innovative marketing approaches responding

to these demands (Silongwengjia, 2017; Orindaru et al., 2021). The move towards product diversification and alternative forms of tourism to mitigate the risks arising from overspecialization in SSS destinations also became a significant research area (Wolf et al., 2017; Zhou, 2022; Lima & Moura, 2017). The integration of alternatives such as culture, nature, health, and MICE with SSS was examined in conjunction with strategies for repositioning destinations (Menon et al., 2022; Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015). Particularly towards the end of the period, issues of crises, risks, and destination resilience moved to the center of SSS research, primarily influenced by various shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Menon et al., 2022). Studies in this area focused on crisis management and sustainable recovery strategies (Silongwengjia, 2017; Shahgerdi et al., 2016). Finally, all these changes brought about an evolution in governance, policy, and planning approaches. The importance of more participatory, holistic, and adaptive models increased, and principles of sustainability, diversification, and resilience began to be integrated into policies and plans (Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015; Gordon, 2007; Zhou, 2022).

In short, SSS tourism research between 2010 and 2024 has shown a clear shift towards an understanding that critically approaches the sector's problems, seeks multidimensional solutions, and is fundamentally based on long-term sustainability.

4.2. Changes in Research Methods and Approaches

The thematic evolution in Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism research has also brought about a diversification in the research methods and theoretical approaches used. The 2010-2024 period was a process in which different methodological tools and theoretical lenses were increasingly used to better understand the complex structure of SSS tourism and the multidimensional problems it faces.

During this period, it is observed that qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as mixed methods, were used in SSS research. For example, the instrumental review approach used by Gordon (2007), and qualitative approaches such as case studies and document analysis, allowed for an in-depth understanding of complex issues like sustainability. On the other hand, while reviewing tourism economics research, Song et al. (2012) drew attention to methodological advances, particularly in demand analysis, an area that generally relies on quantitative methods. Shahgerdi et al. (2016) used content analysis methodology when examining tourism-environment interaction. Particularly in the second half of the period, methods such as literature reviews, systematic reviews, and bibliometric analysis are observed to have increased in broader tourism research related to or applicable to SSS. Lima and Moura (2017) reviewed empirical studies on social tourism, while Sánchez Cañizares et al. (2018) examined sustainable tourism literature in sensitive areas through bibliometric characterization and content analysis, proposing methods like co-word analysis for future research. Similarly, Menon et al. (2022) used bibliometric analysis in their study on post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality education. Such studies have played an important role in synthesizing knowledge in a specific field, identifying research trends, and revealing future research gaps.

From a theoretical perspective, it can be said that SSS research has not been limited to economic rationality and a positivist understanding but has increasingly adopted more critical, interpretative, and sustainability-focused paradigms. Although Song et al. (2012) stated that demand analysis is a dominant focus in tourism economics research, they also advocated for a holistic perspective and institutional/network approaches. The examination of sustainability research (Gordon, 2007; Shahgerdi et al., 2016; Silongwengjia, 2017; Sánchez Cañizares et al., 2018) and topics such as transformational travel (Wolf et al., 2017) or social tourism (Lima & Moura, 2017) has generally

entailed qualitative and interpretative approaches required for understanding complex socio-ecological systems and subjective experiences. The importance of stakeholder theory and collaborative governance models was emphasized in studies such as [Sotiriadis and Varvaressos \(2015\)](#) and [Shahgerdi et al. \(2016\)](#), indicating the use of more inclusive theoretical frameworks in the management and planning of SSS tourism.

Overall, between 2010 and 2024, methodological and theoretical diversity in SSS tourism research has increased, with researchers utilizing different tools and perspectives to better grasp the multi-layered structure and dynamics of SSS. This situation indicates that the field is maturing and increasingly seeking answers to more sophisticated research questions.

4.3. Theoretical and Practical Implications of Identified Trends

The thematic and methodological shifts observed in Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism research between 2010 and 2024 have had significant implications for both the development of theoretical understanding in this field and the practical applications for SSS destinations and businesses. These implications are critically important for SSS tourism to evolve into a more sustainable, resilient, and socially beneficial structure.

- **Theoretical Implications:**

- **Rethinking SSS Tourism Theories:** The centralization of concepts such as sustainability, complexity, stakeholder participation, and transformational experiences in SSS research has led to the questioning of traditional, linear, and solely economically focused theoretical models explaining this type of tourism. Research indicates that SSS should now be conceptualized not merely as a simple supply-demand relationship but as part of dynamic and interconnected social, cultural, economic, and ecological systems ([Gordon, 2007](#); [Shahgerdi et al., 2016](#); [Silongwengjia, 2017](#)). This has increased the need for more holistic, critical, and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks to understand SSS tourism.
- **Contributions to General Tourism Theory:** Research specifically on SSS tourism has also made significant contributions to the development of general tourism theory, particularly on topics such as sustainability ([Gordon, 2007](#); [Shahgerdi et al., 2016](#); [Silongwengjia, 2017](#); [Sánchez Cañizares et al., 2018](#)), destination resilience ([Menon et al., 2022](#)), and transformational experiences ([Wolf et al., 2017](#)). Findings on how these concepts operate in a mass tourism type like SSS provide theoretical insights that may also be valid for other forms of tourism.
- **Strengthening of Critical Tourism Studies:** Increased critical research on the negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts of SSS tourism, power dynamics, and traditional development paradigms has contributed to critical tourism studies gaining ground in the SSS context as well ([Shahgerdi et al., 2016](#); [Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015](#)).

- **Practical Implications:**

- **Shaping Policy and Planning Processes:** Findings from SSS research directly influence policymakers and planners in developing more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive tourism strategies. For example, the complexity of tourism-environment interaction ([Shahgerdi et al., 2016](#)) and the need for well-prepared strategies have encouraged destinations to take environmental impact assessments more seriously and to make plans that consider the balance between conservation and use. Proposals such as reinvesting a portion of tourism revenues into the sustainability of local resources and community

services (Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015) inspire the pursuit of more equitable policies that support local development. Criteria from organizations like the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (Silongwengjia, 2017) provide a framework for creating sustainable tourism policies at local and national levels.

- **Changing Destination Management Understanding:** Research emphasizing the importance of stakeholder collaboration (Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015) and local community participation (Shahgerdi et al., 2016) for the effective management of SSS destinations reveals that Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) need to adopt a more inclusive and collaborative role.
- **Renewing Business Strategies:** Businesses in the SSS sector (hotels, tour operators, etc.) have had to respond to changing tourist expectations and increasing sustainability demands. This requires the adoption of sustainable business practices such as resource efficiency, waste management, and fair working conditions; product diversification offering authentic and transformational experiences (Wolf et al., 2017; Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015); and the implementation of new marketing strategies that effectively use digital tools (Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015; Silongwengjia, 2017). Preparedness for crises and enhancing resilience capacities have also become vitally important for businesses (Menon et al., 2022).
- **Local Development and Social Benefit-Oriented Growth:** Research focusing on social tourism (Lima & Moura, 2017) and the well-being of local communities (Sotiriadis & Varvaressos, 2015) encourages practical steps towards SSS tourism evolving beyond being merely an economic tool into a structure that benefits local people and supports social justice and cultural diversity.
- **Tourism Education and Human Resource Development:** The evolution of SSS tourism and research in this field (Menon et al., 2022) highlights the need to update educational curricula for professionals working in the sector and future researchers to reflect these new paradigms.

In conclusion, the trends identified in SSS tourism research between 2010 and 2024 indicate a deepening of theoretical understanding and offer concrete practical implications for all stakeholders in the sector to transition towards a more responsible, conscious, innovative, and ultimately more sustainable SSS tourism model. This reconfirms the importance of continuous dialogue and collaboration among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

5. Conclusion And Recommendations

This literature review has revealed that academic research in the field of Sea-Sand-Sun (SSS) tourism exhibited a remarkable transformation between 2010 and 2024. SSS tourism, traditionally approached with an emphasis on mass tourism and economic growth, began to be examined during this period from a much more complex, critical, and holistic perspective. Research has acknowledged that SSS is not just an industry but a dynamic phenomenon deeply interacting with the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic systems it inhabits. Underlying this evolution is the centralization of sustainability as a multidimensional paradigm, changing tourist expectations and digitalized marketing strategies, the pursuit of product diversification and alternative tourism, increased sensitivity to crises and resilience efforts, and the need for more participatory and adaptive governance models. This period shows that SSS research has moved beyond merely identifying problems to generating knowledge that supports a solution-oriented, long-term, and responsible tourism approach.

Although the reviewed literature brings forth important trends and practical implications that shed light on the future development of SSS tourism, it also contains some research gaps and limitations. In particular, more studies are needed on the dynamics of SSS tourism in different local contexts and under-researched regions (e.g., developing countries). There is a felt lack of longitudinal research assessing the long-term impacts and permanence of sustainability, diversification, or post-crisis recovery strategies. Furthermore, definitional ambiguities in key concepts such as sustainability and social tourism (Gordon, 2007; Lima & Moura, 2017) and limitations stemming from the nature of some review or bibliometric analysis methodologies used (Sánchez Cañizares et al., 2018; Lima & Moura, 2017) are issues that future studies should address. Topics such as the potential negative impacts and ethical dimensions of technology integration in SSS tourism also stand out as areas not yet sufficiently explored in depth.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that future SSS research be conducted with an approach that considers different contextual characteristics, focuses on long-term impact analyses, examines the practical application challenges and success factors of theoretical models, investigates supply-side dynamics more comprehensively, and addresses the multifaceted impacts of technology. There is a need for studies that are methodologically more robust, conceptually clearer, and that strengthen interdisciplinary collaborations. Emerging topics such as regenerative tourism, the relationship between climate justice and tourism, the role of artificial intelligence and big data in SSS management, the impacts of digital nomadism on coastal destinations, and innovative local solutions to combat overtourism will also constitute important future focus areas for SSS research. Developing mechanisms for more effective transfer of research findings to policy and practice, and increasing the participation of non-academic stakeholders in knowledge production processes, will play a key role in the SSS sector achieving a more equitable, resilient, environmentally sensitive, and socially welfare-enhancing future.

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